

Kathy G. Short and Sheilah Nicholas

Office: Education 513 and Education 521

621-1311, [shortk@u.arizona.edu](mailto:shortk@u.arizona.edu) and [sheilahn@u.arizona.edu](mailto:sheilahn@u.arizona.edu)

Office Hours: Please make an appointment, Wed., 1:00-3:00 and 7:00-8:00 p.m.

## **LRC 581, Spring 2009**

### **MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE AND LITERACY**

#### Catalog Course Description:

Analyzes the use of multicultural literature that fosters a sense of identity and appreciation of diversity to develop literacy. Includes readings from multiethnic literature about Black, Native, Latino, and Asian Americans as well as other specific cultural groups and identities. Focuses on reading from a critical multicultural perspective.

#### Expanded Course Description

An emphasis on integrating multicultural literature into schools and libraries has permeated children's and adolescent literature over the past ten years. This emphasis grew out of research showing that people of color are consistently underrepresented and stereotyped in U.S. children's books and is a response to the increasingly global nature of our society and the growing availability of books from other countries.

This course is based in a broad definition of culture as the specific ways in which people live and think in the world; "the shared patterns that set the tone, character and quality of people's lives" (Geertz, 1973, p. 216). Therefore, while literature related to particular ethnic groups will be highlighted, these books will be examined within a broad understanding of culture as including, but going beyond, ethnicity to language, gender, social class, family structures, religion, race, values, beliefs, etc. We will not look at multiculturalism as a special set of books or a thematic unit that is set apart from the "regular" curriculum" or children's literature. Instead, we will explore multiculturalism as an orientation that permeates the curriculum in order to create an education and a literature that are multicultural (Sleeter and Grant, 1987).

We will explore a literature that is multicultural by examining books and literary engagements that inquire into personal cultural identities, cross-cultural and ethnic studies, multicultural themes and approaches, and inquiries on racism and discrimination; all of these will be examined within a focus on reading multiculturally with a "critical eye." Texts are always socially, culturally, and politically located within a particular perspective. Texts encode cultural values and it's possible for readers to step back, weigh those values on the balance of their own experience and knowledge, and to question, and sometimes reject, the version of the world encoded in that book.

Within this course, our goal is to form a community of readers in which diverse, even opposing, readings of books are welcomed. Our focus isn't on whether individual interpretations are "right" but on critiquing the cultural worlds of books and our response to books through inquiring into how our differing understandings are socially and culturally constructed. Your participation in discussions and engagements is crucial to the success of the course.

Our class experiences are based on the following beliefs about learning:

1. Learning is an active process.  
We will immerse ourselves in reading and responding to professional readings and children's literature.
2. Learning is a social process of collaborating with others.  
We will explore our thinking about our reading and experiences through dialogue in small groups.
3. Learning occurs as we make connections to our own experiences and as we explore tensions with our current beliefs.  
Responses to our readings will focus on connections to our lives and teaching experiences. We will also identify and explore tensions with our current beliefs and past experiences to interrogate our values. We will also explore the tensions that arise from exploring alternative and oppositional interpretations of literature.
4. Choice allows learners to connect to their experiences and feel ownership in their learning.  
We will have choices in the books we read, our responses to readings, and the specific focus of projects and small group activities.
5. Learning is reflective as well as active.  
We will have many opportunities to reflect on what we are learning through writing, talking, sketching, and self-evaluations.
6. Learning occurs in a multicultural world with many ways of knowing.  
We will read professional and children's literature that reflects diversity in experiences and ways of expressing those experiences. We will also explore the range of interpretations of literature that arise from our differing cultural and social experiences.
7. Learning is a process of inquiry.  
As learners we need to search out the questions that matter in our lives and to develop strategies for exploring those questions and sharing our understandings with others.

#### Course Structure:

The following time blocks will be part of the course but the weekly schedule will depend on the particular class focus and on how we as a class negotiate our use of time in the class.

Discussion of children's/adolescent literature  
Presentations and demonstrations  
Whole class/small group discussions of professional readings and issues  
Inquiry groups  
Sharing and Reflection

#### Course Readings:

Norton, Donna (2009). *Multicultural Children's Literature*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Allyn & Bacon  
Fox, Dana & Short, Kathy (2003). *Stories Matter*. NCTE  
Alexie, Sherman (2007). *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. Little Brown.  
Ryan, Pam Muñoz (2005). *Becoming Naomi Leon*. Scholastic.  
Articles on D2L and children's and adolescent literature for small group discussions

## Learning Experiences:

### 1. Participation and attendance

Attend class regularly and actively participate in class discussions, literature circles, written responses, and class activities. An essential aspect of participation is to read and prepare for discussions of children's literature and the professional readings. Preparation and participation in class is significant, not only for your learning, but for the learning of others. If you are absent or not prepared for class, your actions will have a significant impact on others as well as on your own learning. If you absolutely must miss a class session due to illness, leave a message for us in advance at the LRC office (621-1311) or on e-mail.

Contact a class member so that you are fully prepared for the next class meeting. **More than one absence or excessive tardiness/leaving early will affect your grade for the course.**

### 2. Response Journal

The purpose of the journal is for you to reflect on your readings of children's literature and the professional articles and chapters which we discuss in class. Record your understandings, questions, and connections to these readings. Write about your response, not summaries of the readings. The journal is a vehicle to reflect on important and difficult ideas and issues raised by our reading.

In the case of children's literature, respond to the book(s) which we are discussing in class. Your response may include comments about the memories and feelings the book evokes for you, the author's construction of the plot, setting, characters (including their racial, gender or class identities), or themes, the book's perspective on social relations, life and living, etc. Write about your response to the book.

In responding to the professional readings, you may choose to respond to the articles/chapters focusing on ideas or issues you found interesting or provocative that go across the readings. Or you may choose to respond to one of the articles/chapters of particular interest to you or even to an idea in an article/chapter that catches your attention.

You will hand in your journal every week. Use a looseleaf notebook for your journal.

### 3. Cultural Memoir

Write a short cultural memoir where you reflect on who you are as a cultural being and what has shaped you as a cultural being; particularly how your experiences growing up in your family and community have influenced who you are. You can choose the genre and writing style for your cultural memoir - family stories, letters to significant people in your life, poetry, a picture book, etc. Include photographs that reflect the influences in your life if possible. You may want to look at old newspapers or interview family members about the events/issues of the time period in which you grew up.

### 4. Literature Reading Record

You will be browsing and reading many children's and adolescent books throughout the course. Devise some type of recordkeeping system so that you are able to keep track of the books you read for later use. This system is for your use so the format and extensiveness of the record is your decision. Think about what kinds of information that you would want available for later use.

### 5. Evaluation of Award-Winning Children's and Adolescent Literature

Award-winning children's and adolescent literature have often been the focus of research to examine current patterns related to multicultural issues. The major ALA awards (e.g. Caldecott and Newbery) will be announced at the end of January. You will each work with a partner in reading and reviewing several children's and/or adolescent picture books and novels which have been named in these awards. You will evaluate the books based on literary criteria as well as issues of cultural identity, cultural diversity and cultural authenticity, based on our course readings and class discussions. You will also locate journal reviews and background information on the authors to research other perspectives on the books. A written evaluation of the books will be due on March 4 along with a short handout/newsletter to distribute at the conference. You will give book talks during the lunch conversations at the children's literature conference on March 7.

### 6. Participation in the children's literature conference - March 7

Attendance at the Conference on Literature and Literacy for Children's and Adolescents is an essential part of this course. This conference will provide you with multiple perspectives on children's literature and a chance to interact with award-winning authors and illustrators. The conference theme of Building Bridges~Crossing Borders directly relates to our class focus on culture and literature as do the keynote speakers. There is a registration fee of \$20.00 that is due on February 25. As part of our conference participation, you will share books talks and your evaluations of the award-winning books.

### 7. Create a text set for curricular integration

Choose a topic or theme that is highlighted in your classroom curriculum or that interests you. The theme could be related to your basal anthology or social studies or science curriculum, or could be a critical social issue that you want to explore with students. Put together a text set of 10-12 titles that explore this theme from diverse cultural perspectives. Create a handout of an annotated bibliography of the text set and bring the books to share with class members on April 15.

### 8. Inquiry Project

Choose a question or issue of concern to you in relation to cultural issues in children's/adolescent literature. Once you have chosen a particular question, decide on how you will conduct your inquiry to explore that question or issue. You can research your focus through professional readings, children's books, discussions, interviews, observations, and/or work with children. You can choose to do your inquiry project alone or with others. The only limitation on this project is that it needs to relate to cultural issues in children's/adolescent literature and is on a question that matters to you as an educator.

Some possible options for your project are:

- an indepth analysis of a set of books (books about slavery, migrant life, child labor, or a specific cultural group)
- an issue (e.g. censorship of books deemed racist or sexist, stereotypes within a particular group of books)
- a study of an author, illustrator, poet, or theme relevant to multiculturalism
- a community inquiry on programs to promote reading or attitudes toward reading within a particular cultural group

- a study of children's or adults' responses to children's books that are multicultural or related to a specific cultural group
- write your own piece of literature that is based in a specific cultural experience
- your proposal

Form an inquiry group with other individuals who have questions similar to your's. The group will support each other in designing their inquiries, discussing related issues, and thinking through what they are learning.

A project proposal will be due March 25. On this proposal, describe your project in as much detail as possible, including your rationale for undertaking the project, your theoretical framework, your methods of researching your question or issue, etc. Your project will be due May 6. The inquiry projects will be presented to other class members during the last two class sessions, May 6 and 13.

#### 9. Personal Text Set

Create a personal text set of 5-10 books that reflect your cultural identities to share with class members in the last class session. Bring an annotated list of these books on a handout.

#### 10. Evaluation

Self-evaluation and reflection are essential to learning. For each major project, you will write a self-evaluation in which you state your goals for that project and evaluate the process you went through in reaching those goals. We will add evaluative comments based on your goals. You will also write a mid-term evaluation of your learning and an overall self-evaluation of your learning at the end of the class.

Your final grade will be based holistically on both your and our evaluation of your growth and learning, the quality of your written work, and your attendance, participation, and preparation for class sessions. While you can negotiate the ways in which you define class projects, you must complete all of these projects to fulfill course requirements and your final grade for the course will be based on the thoughtfulness and quality of this work with a B reflecting the completion of all course projects at a satisfactory level. Incompletes will not be given for the course except in extreme situations and only with prior approval by the instructor.

#### University Policies

- Approved Absences All holidays or special events observed by organized religions will be honored for those students who show affiliation with that particular religion, Absences pre-approved by the UA Dean of Students (or Dean's designee) will be honored
- Students with Disabilities: If you anticipate issues related to the format or requirements of this course, please meet with me. I would like us to discuss ways to ensure your full participation in the course. If you determine that formal, disability-related accommodations are necessary, it is very important that you be registered with Disability Resources (621-3268; drc.arizona.edu) and notify me of your eligibility for reasonable accommodations. We can then plan how best to coordinate your accommodations

Policies against plagiarism. See the Student Code of Academic Integrity  
[.http://dos.web.arizona.edu/uapolicies](http://dos.web.arizona.edu/uapolicies)

Policies against threatening behavior by students. See the university policies.  
<http://policy.web.arizona.edu/~policy/threaten.shtml>

## **STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES ON MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION**

Department of Language, Reading and Culture, University of Arizona

The term "multicultural education" expresses the essential mission of the department and the university. Multicultural education is not just "about" certain subjects; it does not merely offer "perspectives" on education. It is an orientation to our purposes in education - and ultimately an orientation to life, one that values diversity of viewpoints and experiences and sees people as valuable contributors to the experience of school and society. Life in universities is a self-consciously multicultural.

Learners bring a variety of linguistic and cognitive strengths from their families, communities and nations into the classroom; these strengths are resources to be appreciated as such by educators.

Education must expand on the linguistic and cognitive strengths that learners already possess and bring with them to the classroom, rather than ignore or try to replace them with others.

Respect and appreciation for cultural and community knowledge means that universities serve the interest of education when they allow for an exchange of views, rather than rely exclusively on a transmission model of instruction.

We recognize the existence of a variety of communities - each with its own voice and interests - both within and outside the university; a broad education offers the opportunity to hear and study as many of these voices as possible. Such an accommodation must include those communities which have traditionally been excluded or underrepresented in the university.

Recognition of the validity of these general principles must be reflected in our courses, our relations with students, staff and other faculty members, and in the community life of the Department.

### Tentative Schedule of Class Sessions

January 14	Introduction to the Course: What is culture?
January 21	What are your cultural identities? Due: Rough draft of a cultural memory story Due: Collection of artifacts on your cultural identities. Read Children's/adolescent cultural memoir Read Hollins, C. 1 and 3.
January 28	What is multicultural literature? Due: Cultural memoir Read Norton, C. 1 and Fox/Short, C. 13 and 20
February 4	Cultural Authenticity Read a children's/adolescent novel related to own cultural identity Read Fox/Short, C. 1 and 2 Checklist for stereotypes from Council on Interracial Books for Children
February 11	A Literature and Curriculum that are Multicultural Read <i>Becoming Naomi Leon</i> Read Fox/Short, C. 21 and 22 Read children's/adolescent novel
February 18	Latino Literature Read Norton, C. 4 and Fox/Short, C. 5 and 19 Read children's/adolescent novel
February 25	Native American Literature Read Norton, C. 3, and Fox/Short, C. 6 and 15 Read Sherman Alexie novel
February 26	LRC Colloquy - The Borders of Education: Schooling and the Nation State <a href="http://uacoe.arizona.edu/colloquy/">http://uacoe.arizona.edu/colloquy/</a> (2:30-9:00 p.m., COE)
March 4	Arab American Literature & Book talks of Award-Winning Books Read Norton, C. 7 and article Due: Evaluations of Award-Winning Books
March 7	Conference on Literature and Literacy for Children and Adolescents, 8:00-2:15 College of Education- <a href="http://uacoe.arizona.edu/litconference/">http://uacoe.arizona.edu/litconference/</a>

March 11 Asian American/Pacific Literature  
Read Norton, C. 5 and Fox/Short, C. 9 and 14  
Read children's/adolescent literature  
Due: Mid-term reflection

March 14-15 Tucson Festival of Books - <a href="http://tucsonfestivalofbooks.org/">http://tucsonfestivalofbooks.org/</a>
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March 17 Spring Break

March 25 African American Literature  
Read Norton, C. 2 and Fox/Short, C. 3 and 4  
Read children's/adolescent literature  
Due: Project Proposal

April 1 Cultural Experiences Beyond Ethnicity  
Read Norton, C. 6 and Fox/Short, C. 7, 8, 11  
Read children's/adolescent literature

April 8 The Complexities of Cultural Authenticity  
Read Fox/Short, C. 12, 16, 17, 18  
Read children's/adolescent literature

April 15 Curricular Integration of Diverse Cultural Perspectives  
Read articles  
Bring a text set and bibliography around a curricular theme

April 22 Critically Reading the Word and the World  
Read articles

April 29 No Class - Inquiry Project Work Time

May 6 Project Presentations  
Final projects due

May 13 Project Presentations and Share Personal Text Sets  
Personal cultural text sets  
Final reflections due